DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 882 EA 018 567

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TITLE A New General Education: Responding to the Changing Family and Society.
PUB DATE 4 Mar 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (San Francisco, CA, March 1-4, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Futures (of Society); *Humanistic Education; School Community Relationship; *School Responsibility; *Social Change; Social Responsibility

ABSTRACT

Educational changes in the form of curriculum development are needed in response to post-industrial socioeconomic shifts that have created a legacy of future problems for today's students. "A new general education" must prepare youth to cope with societal issues and define values for a humane world. Educators should consider futurists' declarations that solutions for problems can no longer be discovered in past experience and knowledge. Development of a desirable future depends on recognition of serious world problems, initiation of value changes that produce a livable world, and acceptance of responsibility for promoting those values, particularly in the schools. A list of "shifting values toward a new age" is divided into sections for "industrial age values" and "new age values," with 15 contrasting values in each category developed in subsequent analysis. For example, the industrial age value of "conspicuous consumption" is opposed by the new age value of "enoughness consumption." In conclusion, schools have responsibility to inform both learners and community about issues emanating from changing values and to address local and global problems through systematic curriculum planning. (CJH)

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ED270882

1986 Annual Meeting
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
San Francisco, California
Room 306
Mosconi Civic Center
8:30 - 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, March 4, 1986

A NEW GENERAL EDUCATION: RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Educational changes of both kind and degree are critically needed in response to current shifts in family, social, and economic patterns. General Education programs must prepare youth the cope with these changes and provide cognitive and affective experiences that prepare them to define this future. A rethinking of the traditional roles provided by home, school, and community is creating new demands for the expansion and specification of general education to prepare youth to succeed in the shifting postindustrial society.

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[The following has been adapted from "Epilogue: Into the Future," the final section of CURRICULUM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, by James A. Beane, Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr., and Samuel J. Alessi, Jr, published by Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1986]

EA 018 567

Children entering kindergarten in 1986 will live the majority of their lives in the twenty-first century and, if medical research persists at its present rate, some will, no doubt, personally experience the beginnings of the twenty-second century. If curriculum plans are based only upon the present state of our world and society, they might justly be regarded as educationally unfair to children and youth. In taking a proactive stance about the future, curriculum planners should consider the following kinds of questions.

+ What are some of the broad, global futures issues in our world and society which will likely influence or confront tomorrow's world?

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+ How might these issues influence the nature of education and learning, as well as the form of schooling?

+ What forecasts or "visions" of the future might be formed from thinking about futures issues?

+ How might today's curriculum plans lead to awareness of the future, future-oriented decision making, and the creation of new agendas in school and society?

In reaching the present time, humankind has gone through several phases. At the earliest, human survival was almost dependent upon the whims of nature, geography, and chance. From this stage emerged the agricultural way of life which was marked by efforts to control the environment so that survival was more likely. This was a beginning effort to plan for the future. In a third stage, an industrial society developed in which people not only used early technology to improve their way of life but also increasingly came together in larger communities. Along with the rapid evolution of machinery and other technology, there arose a scientific view of the world and of human nature and behavior. It might justly be said that the past few centuries have been almost altogether rooted in science and the technology which it produces. Now as the second millennium nears its end, we find ourselves at a new junction in civilization.

The industrial age is breaking up and giving way to a new phase based not only on the tremendous advances which the industrial age brought, but also upon our reactions to them. Since its true nature is, as yet, undefined, perhaps the safest way to characterize this new stage is as the "post-industrial society." In forecasting possible trends, various futurists have also used labels such as "the information society," "the person-centered society," "the technological society," and others, depending upon their view of those trends.

Whatever the actual label, most futurists seem to agree that while the industrial age brought many benefits, it also gave rise to enormous problems. The same technology which has brought power and convenience to industry and society has also led to overconsumption of scarce resources such as water, soil, energy and living space. The harnessing of nuclear power has also produced the threat of nuclear war and problems with nuclear waste. Higher standards of living among some groups in certain regions have been based upon inequitable distribution of wealth, power, and resources. The convenience of technology in most parts of society has also produced serious threats to ecological balance, such as acid rain. Advances in medical technology have led to moral-political dilemmas associated with genetic engineering, biochemical manipulation, euthanasia, and distribution of donor transplant organs. It should be clear that our world has already paid and will continue to pay a price for the fruits of the industrial age.

The industrial phase of our development has also produced a myriad of social and political problems. The centralization of power and decision-making has alienated and disenfranchised large segments of the population. Third-world issues and the problems of developing nations typify these concerns. The emphasis on the work-ethic is so deeply rooted in our thinking that unemployment is perhaps more a psychological than an economic problem. The drive to maintain affluence has led to tensions related to heart disease, substance abuse, alcoholism, crime, poor mental health, and suicide. This rapid pace of change has been paralleled by the emergence of a sometimes bewildering array of lifestyle values which often contradict long-standing customs and traditions.

In light of all this, today's youth are faced with two major problems. One is that they are the first generation in which most will have little chance of exceeding the standard of living achieved by their parents. Second, their very survival in adulthood may well depend upon their success in solving the the environmental, social, political, and economic problems created by previous generations.

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Futurists themselves are not certain how the new age will take shape. Some believe in what is called "techni-fix," the idea that new technology, as yet undiscovered, will be invented to solve problems like resource scarcity, environmental pollution, and world hunger. Others believe that in order to survive we must go through a transformation of values which will shift our social and personal priorities. A few feel that our world has passed the point of survival capacity and its future, if there is one, will depend mostly on pure chance.

At present, the majority of our own society seems tied to a combined version of the first and second views. As daily reports of technological advances are announced, most people appear optimistic about some degree of "techni-fix," at least with regard to environmental, resource, and medical problems. On the other hand, many are disturbed by the moral and values dilemmas which permeate our world. They have become increasingly skeptical of the purely scientific or mechanistic view. Some have reacted by forming small communes based on a common set of values which are counter to what they see as those held by the larger society. These range from survivalist groups opposed to governmental intervention to homestead communities searching for more basic values not tied to technology. Still others have sought refuge in fundamentalist religious groups which offer "right or wrong" beliefs in a society which otherwise seems without answers. Others, such as the "Yuppies," have sought a balance between an economically successful work-life and a personally gratifying social life. Whatever the variation, it is clear that large segments of the population are aware of the dissonance and ambiguity in our society and, while they may not fully understand it, have nonetheless attempted a personally acceptable way of resolving it.

Our view is that while technology will surely provide many benefits, the development of a safe, sane, and desirable future depends to a large degree on three basic possibilities:

+ the realization that we face many serious problems in our world;

+ the willingness to initiate and accept shifts in our values which will produce a liveable and humane world; and,

+ the acceptance of responsibility for promoting those values, especially among powerful nations and institutions, including schools.

Awareness of future-oriented problems will represent an important step toward improving the quality of life as we move into the post-industrial society. However, new values must also emerge from this awareness. Our final frame illustrates some examples of the shift from industrial to "new age values." Early stages of these shifts can already be observed in changing interests and beliefs among various groups in our society. Others reside only in "visions" of a desirable future. Likewise, some may be pursued with relatively little conflict while others represent fundamental changes in our way of life. Several basic concepts underlie these value shifts.

+ People are more important than institutions and therefore political, social, and economic institutions ought to serve human needs rather than direct them.

+ Isolationism within and across local, regional , and national boundaries contradicts the obvious interdependence among peoples of the world.

+ Centralization and inequitable distribution of wealth, power, and resources debilitates the essential right to human dignity.

+ Overemphasizing linear, convergent thinking impedes the development of intuitive, creative solutions to human problems.

+ Contemporary overdependence on technology and unlimited growth threatens delicate balances in ecological systems.

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+ The future can be created in a desirable form rather than simply occurring by chance.

The acceptance of these concepts and related values, although they may be disruptive to our present belief systems, is a critical need if we are to resolve the issues which will confront us in the foreseeable future.

SHIFTING VALUES TOWARD A NEW AGE

Industrial Age Values	TO	New Age Values
Reactive Planning		Proactive Planning
Present Gratification		Concern for the Future
Competition		Cooperation
Individual Isolation		Interdependence
Competitive Distribution of Wealth, Power, and Resources		Equitable Distribution of Wealth, Power, and Resources
Acquisition of Information		Using Information for Social Good
Conspicuous Consumption		Enoughness Consumption
Specialization of Occupations		Generalist Roles
Hierarchical Power		Problem-Solving Networks
Centralization of Power		Participatory Consensus
Linear Thinking		Systemic Thinking
Conformity to Norms		Promotion of Diversity
Emphasis on Science		Balance among Science, Art, Perception and Intuition
Dependence on Technology		Selective Use of Technology for Human Purpose
Unlimited Growth Goals		Selective, Planned Growth

As the designated educative institution in our society, schools have a responsibility to inform both learners and the community about compelling issues, including those which have implications for the future. Curriculum plans ought to reveal and address such problems as the interdependency of world populations, the threat of nuclear destruction; the inequitable distribution of wealth, power and justice, world hunger, dysfunctional ecological systems, the hazards of disproportionate affluence among nations, depletion of resources, and the moral issue of technological infusion. In examining more regional local life, such issues would further include problems connected with the aging of people, the changing roles for women and minority groups, the cultural and political exclusion of particular population segments, the shift from a manufacturing to an information-rich society, the impact of media on the belief systems and self-esteem, the psychological impact of non-employment, the long term effects of nutritional deficiency, and the causes of crime and other anti-social behavior.

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Changing the Posture of Schools

By emphasizing the existence of these problems, the school would begin to assume a responsible role in developing awareness among both young and older learners. Beyond this, however, the school must consider how its own institutional form will respond to these issues. In so doing, the following ideas represent some possible responsive actions for schools.

1. The curriculum must become "futures-loaded" through direct units organized around futures issues. Also, we must consider how such issues may permeate other parts of the curriculum such as the literature we read, the themes of our essays and poetry, the content of our mathematics word problems, the content of our science activities, the topics of our social studies units, the problems in our home economics and industrial arts projects, and so on.

2. The sequence of learning opportunities must be viewed in lifelong terms rather than early childhood through completion of adolescence. As population age increases and work-time decreases, people will seek opportunities to learn across the lifespan. The information-rich society with its technological access will make such learning a way of life. We will need what Harold Shane termed a "seamless curriculum," which abandons the limits of age and grade in school forms in favor of an open, accessible, and continuing approach to education.

3. Among other basic skills, the school must consider teaching how to use decision-making approaches commonly employed by futurists in problem analysis. These would include delphi techniques, consensus decision methods, scenario development, cross impact matrices, simulation gaming, time series extrapolation, brainstorming, and the like. These approaches should be used persistently in considering topical problems and in making decisions about curriculum and school-related concerns.

4. The form of the school as an institution should represent or illustrate a preferred form of society. This means that governance would be based upon participatory decision-making. Institutional expedience would be secondary to human needs. Emphasis should be placed on high levels of interaction, cooperation, and interdependence. Systematic attempts would be made to remove vestiges of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice. Diversity would be prized over conformity. Rules and regulations would promote individual dignity and social responsibility rather than focusing on petty or mundane issues. Such arrangements as grouping and scheduling would be used to support learning rather than to merely sort, label and process groups of learners. Evaluation would emphasize self-assessment rather than external judgment alone.

5. The schools must assume a more responsible role in helping communities deal with local needs and problems. The material and technological resources of the school should be available to individual citizens and groups involved in problem-solving. Community service project programs should involve youth and educators in volunteer efforts to improve the quality of community life. Barriers to school-community cooperation such as bureaucratic convenience, institutional arrogance and poor communications need to be replaced by attitudes of openness and interdependence.

These shifts in institutional and curriculum aspects of the school represent a fundamental reconceptualization of the values which it portrays and promotes. However, these shifts parallel the values and concepts which will be necessary if humankind is to move toward a new age in which we overcome the problems that emerged in the industrial age. As such, they are also necessary if we are to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and values they will need to live satisfying lives in the next century. To engage in this reconceptualization is to create a school which assumes a responsible role in realizing a compelling and worthwhile vision of the future. To suggest that such a school is unrealistic is to suggest that the school as an institution should not or cannot contribute to the long-range quality of life in our society and world.

Futures Goals for Schools

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Schools are the only social institution charged with the responsibility for educating the young. However, the dissipating influence of other agencies does not justify avoidance of the school's distinctive social function in society. Rather, it makes the school's role even more important since it may be the last institution in which concern for the young is a persistent goal. Even if that were not the case, it is still necessary to consider the place of the school in preparing young people to face the realities of their present and future lives. While the exact nature of the future is impossible to predict, it is most probable that the mix of emerging technological, political, social, and economic factors will require thinking and information processing skills more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. These cognitive skills will be necessary if people are to deal adequately with the growing affective concerns in our world.

In light of these considerations we believe that both citizens and professionals must carefully deliberate about the nature of curriculum planning toward the future. We also believe that such deliberations must identify important issues which may suggest direction for goals and curriculum plans. At the very least, a curriculum agenda for the future should focus on priorities such as those which follow here. In other words, schools should help young people achieve knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors which will allow them:

1) To consider intelligently the complex issues which affect daily living in our society. Such issues include the essential need for world peace, the political, social, and economic aspects of class politics, energy resource depletion, global interrelationships, personal alienation, futures forecasts, and the like. Lacking comprehension of these problems, people are likely to experience frustration which results in aggression, apathy, and submission.

2) To formulate value/moral systems which will promote responsible and thoughtful responses to personal and social issues. The absence of such systems is likely to allow amoral hedonism, confusion, and moral barbarism.

3) To secure a sense of belonging and self-worth. Such perceptions begin in small groups and eventually extend through larger settings in the community, nation, and the world. The lack of personal security leads to alienation and negative self-esteem.

4) To develop a sense of "enoughness" in the context of personal lifestyle and standard of living. It is unlikely that succeeding generations can sustain even our present standard of living without depriving other people in the world of basic necessities and without exhausting natural resources.

5) To maintain a reasonable balance between technological convenience and human needs. For example, immersion in media threatens human interaction. and "junk" foods jeopardize our nutritional needs. We stand in jeopardy of developing and using technology to limit rather than benefit and extend our human capacities.

6) We are on the verge of obviating the need for personal accumulation of information because of technologies which organize, integrate, and use knowledge for us. As new knowledge is produced and people have instant access to what is known, skills associated with information use will become increasingly important.

7) To develop a sense of global interdependence. What happens in one place in our world increasingly affects aspects of living for others. Isolationist thinking threatens world peace. To sustain a livable planet, people must transcend the ideological and geographic boundaries which came to characterize and then permeated the industrial age.

8) To develop an optimistic and creative attitude toward living and learning. Negative images of aging are unproductive and debilitating, especially as lifespans increase. In the information society, continuous learning will be necessary to maintain positive self esteem.

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9) To develop skills and predispositions associated with democratic living. At all levels of human relationships, the democratic way of life still offers the best hope for empowering people. Cooperation must replace competition and equity must supersede elitism. The absence of such conditions leads to alienation, disenfranchsement, and inequality.

10) To formulate visions of the future toward which personal and social action may be directed. The compelling question of our times should not be "what will the future be like"," but rather "what do we want the future to be?" We are still a society of individuals, but the quality of our future depends upon a collective and compelling image of its shape. Thus personal images must also be integrated into a common sense of values upon which our world might be brought to a worthwhile and desirable form.

The Horizon Approaches

In summary, we should consider that futurists say our planet has now passed the point in time at which we can expect to find solutions for the problems of the future in the world's past experiences and knowledge. Rather, we need to define and find solutions from the study of future conditions. Our society, species, and planet must deal with problems of a kind and degree which we have never before faced. Prior to 1985, human survival was measured by the degree to which people could overcome problems created by nature. The high school graduating class of 1985 is estimated to have been the first which will concentrate their lives on trying to overcome this legacy of problems created by past generations. In the past, predictable cycles have occurred and we could "pull back" during times of retrenchment and wait for a propitious event to re-cycle a time of resurgence. Now, it is less likely that history will re-cycle and allow us to make such use of the past.

HumanKind's naive and imprudent use of our growing knowledge of science and continually advancing technologies has brought about the negative aspects of the problems previously discussed. Society's need at this "watershed" time is to respond and work at solving the problems facing today's and subsequent graduating classes. The survival and prosperity of our planet and its inhabitants into the third millennium will depend on our success in educating the next generation. Can we educate youth to utilize the knowledge of science and the potential of technologies toward solving this residue of problems created by and inherited from previous generations? Can we help youth define values which they may use to build and sustain a more humane world? We believe that curriculum planning has the key role in designing educational responses to these issues.

In past times, schools would "dodge the bullets" of critics and wait for the disaster to subside. We suggest that such an educational posture is now definitely obsolete. Such an approach will neither allow schools to survive nor orchestrate the resources which could develop educational programs to take us to unimagined positive realities.

We recommend the best pro and interactive strategy is to develop the capacity for systemic curriculum planning. We are certainly not being overcritical or unjust in our analysis of schools. Quite to the contrary, our suggestions reflect the belief that schools can make a difference. Most important is that educators need not develop a totally new set of processes for transforming their roles and the nature of schools. Eighty years of curriculum thinking have produced a substantial reservoir of ideas for curriculum planning and development. The task is finally to put these into action as we plan toward the third millennium. Let us get on with the process.

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